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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2020  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [SU](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: DECREASES IN DARFUR FIGHTERS IN ERITREA

REF: 09 ASMARA 368

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) The number of fighters from Darfur rebel groups in Eritrea has shrunk considerably over the last few months, according to Abdul Beghi, a representative from the Revolutionary Democratic Freedom Forces (RDFF) in Asmara. Beghi said most of the fighters, who were stationed along Eritrea's western border, "escaped" once the Eritrean government (GSE) tried to unite the movements under the JEM banner several months ago. He also mentioned the GSE wanted to invite the Janjaweed to come to Eritrea and join this coalition, but the other fighters opposed this move. Beghi believed the GSE is an agitator in the region, and its goal in hosting the fighters is to have a controlling stake in one of the Sudanese government's most pressing concerns. According to Beghi, the following numbers of Darfur fighters are present in Eritrea:

- JEM: 400
- SLM/Abdulwahid: 80 (down from 380)
- SLM/Khamis: 50 (down from 250)
- Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA): 35

(NOTE: The two other known Darfur groups in Eritrea, SLM/Minnawi and RDFF, do not have armed wings in country to Post's knowledge. End Note)

¶2. (C) Osman Wash, JEM's former legal advisor turned independent Darfur analyst, said the status of the troops is more complicated than Beghi presented. Wash said the fighters "are more like refugees." They are unable to return to Sudan for fear of arrest and are being offered protection by the GSE. Contrary to the paranoid views of the Sudanese embassy, he continued, the GSE is not arming the fighters/refugees along the border, but is simply offering a safe haven. Wash also stated the estimate of JEM fighters in Eritrea is "largely overblown." He thought the GSE could play a constructive role in Sudan by simply being neutral, which he defined as continuing to offer a safehaven and not providing arms to the Darfur groups.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The GSE views itself as the only government in the region with answers. It will continue to court rebel groups in an attempt to recreate the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement(ESPA), which the GSE helped craft and which it touts as an example of its regional diplomatic prowess. The

drop in fighter/refugees could reflect diminished GSE influence resulting from its attempt to force them into one coalition under JEM. It could also be a result of the Sudanese government's demands in October 2009 for the GSE to stop arming insurgent groups (reftel). Regardless of the reason for the reported drop in armed Darfuris, the groups' political leaders still congregate in Asmara with little purpose. It is possible the GSE will continue to try to unite the groups for its own purposes, however unlikely success might be.

McMullen